LIBRARY DEDICATION
J. Harry Cotton Library
June 1, 1975

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Columbus, Ohio

The facility that has been constructed over the past several months, and which we dedicate this morning will become an important part of the witness and mission of Broad Street Presbyterian Church. On behalf of the congregation, and on behalf of members of the congregation in the years ahead, I wish to express profound gratitude to those whose vision and generosity have made possible this new resource.

Among many other images of the Church, one which strikes me as essential is that of a theological seminary, a center of intellectual stimulation, a place where ideas are alive and where the idea of God is placed in regular dialogue with other ideas. I am partial to the image of the church as the place where people are equipped to be Christians in the world: and if that image has merit, it is only insofar as the Church provides the stimulation and the resources to help people think theologically about their lives, their relationships, their roles in the world, and the entire sweep of history.

Elton Trueblood has this to say about the subject: "In the effort to provide members of the Church with assistance in the fierce struggle in which they are necessarily involved as Christians, (books) are of inestimable value. Good as the spoken word may be, the printed word is better."

The Incendiary Fellowship, p 62

That is why the dedication of a new library is an event of major significance in the life of a Church. The library is the place where you may go for information: for inspiration: for stimulation: it is also - happily - a place where you may sit quietly and do the important work of relaxing and thinking and reflecting.

The other reason this event is so significant is that it has given us the opportunity of honoring a man whose life has meant a great deal to this congregation, to the United Presbyterian Church, and to the entire universal Church of Jesus Christ. When plans for the library were in process the Session of this Church adopted a resolution naming the new facility the J. Harry Cotton Library - with Dr. Cotton's consent "in gratitude for Dr. Cotton's long and successful ministry at Broad Street Presbyterian Church and his life of scholarly contribution to the United Presbyterian Church and its educational institutions."

It is a particular joy to welcome Dr. and Mrs. Cotton this morning. For me it is a very special privilege that I have coveted and am enjoying thoroughly. For one thing, Dr. Cotton was younger that I am when he became Senior Minister of this Church. On occasion, when I have visited in this parish, some persons - not unkindly - have remarked on my relative youth. Ordinarily that comment leaves me without much to say in response: the alternatives are few indeed. Until, that is, I discovered that I am fully seven years older than Dr. Cotton was when he assumed the Broad Street Pulpit. The matter is ordinarily ended when I reveal that information. Although I confess that I should not argue were someone to take up the gauntlet and retort: "Well, they certainly don't make them the way they used to."

In one of our many correspondences prior to this day he remarked that we shouldn't make too much of this affair." You have read about his life in the Broadstreeter. He came to this Church as pastor in 1928 from the College of Wooster, where he was teaching philosophy. A graduate of Wooster and Princeton Theological Seminary, he was awarded the Ph. D. degree in philosophy from Princeton University. While at Broad Street he served the larger church in a way that would be repeated throughout his professional life. He left as a lecturer and speaker in great demand

Broad Street to become President of McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, in 1940. In the years which followed he taught at several colleges and universities, among them Harvard Divinity School.

The importance of his life is that he exhibited that rare capacity to be "a man for all seasons." A scholar with intellectual precision: but a pastor with warmth of heart: a man at home in the world of books and theses and academic ~~rigor~~ rigor, He was also more than at home baptizing an infant, or praying for the sick or counseling with the distraught: a teacher in the era when Karl Barth and Paul ~~Tillick~~ Tillich forever altered the theological landscape, Harry Cotton could moderate a Session meeting, and guide a Stewardship Committee. Our paths crossed briefly in Indiana, but I quickly perceived something very special and valuable in this venerable Professor of Philisophy at Wabash College, who seemed to enjoy ~~fully~~ filling the pulpit in small, rural Indiana churches.

More needs to be said than time allows this morning. Harry Cotton expressed the rare combination of scholar and humble Christian in a sermon which he preached in this Church several years ago, "... in this world our faith can live and breathe. There is more in this Christian Faith - oh, much, much more than anything you or I have yet discovered or imagined."

What we do this morning recognizes our dependence today on history - and those who have walked before us. It honors one person whose contributions to what this Church is and has been and will be, was immense. But in the highest sense - it honors the Lord he served and continues to serve.

Will you join me now in prayer as we dedicate the J. Harry Cotton Library to the Glory of God -

Let us pray -

Almighty and Eternal God, you have given us minds to know you, hearts to love you and voices to sing your praise. We come before you this morning, our faith, in deep gratitude. We are thankful for your church in all its expressions - in its history of faithfulness across the centuries - particularly we give thanks for this people - This congregation which you have called together & through which you have wrought (or worked) your will and spoken your word in this place. We are reminded this morning, our faith, of all those who have gone before us, whose faith & love & commitment were poured into the life of this church; and whose labors have produced a strong & vital people of hope for this community.

We give thanks for the ministry of Harry Cotton - here in our midst - and in the wider church. We praise you for the gifts you have given to him & the ways in which you continue to use him for the building of your kingdom on earth.

Our Father, what we build here - what we dedicate this morning - is to your glory & your honor. We give thanks for spirits that are restless until they are found by you: for minds that seek the truth: for intellects that ask difficult questions: We thank you for the the skill of theologians & philosophers and historians and poets - whose vocation it is to think & write - and stimulate us to be impatient - to seek - to grow.

O God, we sense that we are living in important times: when the ideas of the past are challenged: when your word confronts other words in new & and exciting ways. We would be the instruments of your word: we would speak & live for you. So - in gratitude and in faith and in hope - we humbly dedicate to your glory - the J. Harry Cotton Library. Use the work of our hands - and minds, for your glory & honor: in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord & Savior - Amen